

BELMONT HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

Town Hall

June 11, 2003

Meeting Minutes

Commission Members Attending: Co-chair Richard Cheek, Paul Bell, Linn Hobbs, Arleyn Levee, Richard Pichette, Nancy Richards, Michael Smith, Sharon Vanderslice.
Absent: Co-chair Lydia Ogilby, Jonathan Treat.

WAVERLEY FIRE STATION

Richard Cheek announced that all three of Belmont's fire stations had been declared eligible by the Massachusetts Historical Commission for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. This is the first step in the process of placing the buildings on the Register, an action which would allow the future owners of the buildings to claim a tax credit if they renovated the buildings according to the U. S. Secretary of the Interior's standards for rehabilitation.

A warrant article that would allow the Board of Selectmen to sell the Waverley fire station building will be voted on by Town Meeting on June 15. The Historic District Commission was asked by Morrissey & Hawkins, counsel to the Town of Belmont, to help draft wording that would require the exterior of that building to be preserved by future owners. The Commission voted unanimously to draft an article that would permit sale of the fire station subject to the preservation and rehabilitation of the building's exteriors according to the Secretary of the Interior's standards.

PLEASANT STREET RECONSTRUCTION

Attending: Arthur Wolfson, Pleasant Street resident.

Mr. Cheek circulated a letter dated June 4, 2003, from the Massachusetts Historical Commission, approving the 75% engineering plans for reconstruction of this road subject to the conditions set forth by the Belmont Historic District Commission in its approval letter to the Belmont Board of Selectmen on April 29. This letter is necessary to proceed with the project.

Sharon Vanderslice reported on efforts to get conduit laid under the street to accommodate utility lines that now hang from poles above ground. The town's Municipal Light Department has already agreed to install conduit from Trapelo Road to Brighton Street so that electrical wires can be buried in the future. Town Administrator Mel Kleckner is contacting the telephone and cable companies with a similar request. This issue will be discussed by the Board of Selectmen on June 30.

Arleyn Levee reported on the Board of Selectmen's tree removal appeal hearing held on June 9. She said that the first part of the roadway to be rebuilt will be the section between Concord Avenue and the Shaw's Market driveway. The selectmen agreed to save several dozen of the 118 trees that were to be taken down during the course of the project. Some of those to be saved are in the Historic District, including a large horse chestnut, a butternut, a maple, and a red maple. Some trees that were to be removed because the project engineer thought they would not survive road reconstruction are, in fact, fed by underground waterways and will be retained. To save any more of the 118 trees would require adoption by the state of a "footprint roadway program" that would allow the proposed roadway to be narrower than currently planned. This program will not be in place before October, at which time it may be too late to change the Pleasant Street plans without significant additional design expense.

Resident Arthur Wolfson inquired about changing the design of the curbing on the street. He was told that the Commission had already approved the curb design in its letter to the Board of Selectmen on April 29.

DRAFT PRESERVATION EASEMENT FOR 5 SOMERSET STREET

Attending: Frank and Gillian Aguilar, owners, with their attorney, Catherine Shortsleeve, and their architect, John Freeman. Also in the room were abutters John Sos and Anne Porter, and several dozen other residents of the town, including Kit and Ted Dreier, Martha Moore, Sherry Jones, Audrey Lenk, Victoria Haase, Dix Campbell.

Ms. Shortsleeve reviewed the changes that the Aguilars had made to the Draft Preservation Easement in response to the Commission's comments in May. After Commission members discussed these changes with the Aguilars, Mr. Cheek invited members of the audience to speak and many did. Following an extended discussion, the Commission voted 5-2, with one abstention, not to approve the draft of the easement as submitted. Those voting to approve the easement (Cheek, Levee) said that while there are other ways to save this barn from collapse, adaptive reuse was a well-recognized method of preservation, and they thought the Aguilars had done an admirable job of responding to the Commission's concerns regarding the preservation easement. Ms. Levee said she believed that any areas not specifically mentioned in the document would be covered by the Belmont Historic District Commission's jurisdiction over all properties in the district. Three of those voting against the draft (Bell, Richards, Smith) said that the barn was one of the last vestiges of Belmont's agrarian past and that to allow two owners on the site at 5 Somerset would cause irreparable harm to the integrity of the property, even if a detailed, tightly written preservation easement existed. Therefore, they voted against the easement because they believed it would ultimately be ineffective in protecting the character of the property. Mr. Bell noted that Article 15 of the agreement would allow any future dispute over the restriction to be resolved by arbitration, a legal process that the HDC may not have funds to pursue. Two other 'no' voters (Hobbs, Vanderslice) said that they would vote 'yes' if the preservation easement included a prohibition on additional structures anywhere on the property, whether viewed from a

public way or not. Richard Cheek asked these two to draft a paragraph stating their objections to the preservation easement as currently written, so that the Aguilar's could respond to the objections at a future meeting if they chose to do so. One member (Pichette) recused himself because he had previously acted on the Aguilar's behalf by helping them create a first draft of an easement last winter.

TOWN HALL COMPLEX RENOVATION

Attending: John Hodge of Donham and Sweeney, Architects.

Mr. Hodge came before the Commission to request approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for renovations to the Town Hall Annex and the School Administration Building. The Commission, which had reviewed plans for these structures at previous meetings, voted unanimously to approve the Certificate, with the condition that the project's architect submit for HDC approval all exterior paint colors; exterior lighting; shop drawings of exterior millwork, doors, windows, and hardware; and a final landscape plan with all plant materials specified.

701 PLEASANT STREET

Attending: Sarah Bush, owner, and Tom Hecht, architect.

Ms. Bush and Mr. Hecht presented revised drawings for this renovation project, which would convert the existing two-bay garage into a family room and connect it to the main house with a glassed-in walkway. In response to recommendations the Commission made in May, Mr. Hecht revised the drawings to show hinged custom doors on the garage with bead board detailing and true divided light windows (mimicking actual garage doors of the period). He also eliminated the clapboarding proposed for the connecting walkway. In addition, he removed a proposed cupola on the garage, and substituted a skylight that is flush with the roof on the side facing the house (the least visible side). A Certificate of Appropriateness was approved unanimously.

23 CENTRE AVENUE

Attending: Tom and Heather Blake, owners.

The Blakes presented a landscaping plan, drafted by designer Victoria Hubbard, for the hilly property surrounding their 1861 house on Centre Avenue. They want to replace the existing fencing that abuts Sunnyside Place with trees and shrubs, add a circular brick patio at the eastern corner of the house, build some new fieldstone retaining walls, replace existing asphalt ramps and concrete walks with granite steps and walkways of brick or bluestone, and edge the driveways with Belgian pavers. The plan also included a gazebo sited above a rocky outcropping in the northwest corner of the yard. Arleyn

Levee suggested that the design be simplified by eliminating the gazebo and a proposed brick path around the rocky outcropping, simplifying the materials throughout, installing a simple pipe railing (painted black, with clean joints) next to the steps, and changing the shape of the patio. A circle is a very strong shape, she said; something more in keeping with the boxiness of the house and garage would be more appropriate. Any new retaining walls should be built of natural fieldstone with raked joints and large fieldstone tops, she added. In choosing a walkway material, she urged the Blakes to consider that bluestone is a sedimentary rock and thus cannot be salted. She urged the Blakes to visit the Olmsted house, Fairsted, at 99 Warren Street in Brookline, a National Park Service property that is open to the public, to see how Frederick Law Olmsted dealt with similar design issues.

20 MOORE STREET

Linn Hobbs, a member of the Historic District Commission and a property owner in the district, discussed preliminary plans for adding two parking spaces to this property, which he said was the only one in Belmont with no provision for parking. (He has no driveway, and on-street parking is prohibited at night.) The owner of the commercial building next door at 18 Moore Street has verbally agreed to give Mr. Hobbs vehicular access to his backyard through an adjacent alley. Mr. Hobbs would like to install two parallel parking places and a retaining wall on the edge of his backyard. Mr. Cheek told Mr. Hobbs that he would need to have a Certificate of Appropriateness approved by the Commission in order to begin work, and that 14 days notice would need to be given to the abutters in advance of the hearing on this certificate.

The next meeting of the Historic District Commission is Wednesday, July 9.

Minutes recorded by Sharon Vanderslice.